

Title of Project: Evaluating Nutrition Education Materials

Agency Name: Bureau of Nutrition & WIC Iowa Department of Public Health

State: Iowa

Key Word Descriptors: Print materials, audiovisual programs, evaluation criteria, readability, comprehension, design

Description of Project:

Written and audiovisual materials are often an important component in providing nutrition education to individuals and groups. They serve to reinforce key concepts and provide additional details. Recent research conducted in Iowa and Georgia indicates that dietitians often review nutrition education materials before use. However, the same research indicates that dietitians seldom use a systematic process that considers all factors related to reading, comprehension, content, design and technical quality. Without a systematic process, materials may be selected that are inappropriate for the target audience, resulting in ineffective nutrition education and wasted resources.

The Iowa WIC Program and the Iowa EFNEP Program partnered to revise evaluation tools for print and audiovisual materials and to develop three new related publications. The first versions of the evaluation tools were developed in 1988 by the same authors in response to the NAWD/USDA Nutrition Services Standards (at that time, both authors worked at the Iowa Department of Public Health). The tools were widely distributed across the country and overseas, and were used or adapted by a number of public health programs. Although the tools were developed to evaluate nutrition education materials, almost all of the evaluation criteria are general in nature and apply to all topics and audiences.

Based on the feedback from users around the world and the research mentioned previously, the tools were significantly revised, accompanying guides were developed to provide a context about the four-step process for selecting effective materials, and an annotated bibliography was created. The evaluation criteria were regrouped, reordered and redefined to eliminate duplication and improve clarity. The tools were also reformatted for easier reading and to allow more room for notes by the reviewer. This also allows space for reviewers to add specific criteria about special issues (such as breastfeeding) or special target audiences (such as low literacy). The accompanying guides provide information requested by many who used the first tools. Each guide reviews the four-step process and provides helpful background information about defining your target audience, using evaluation criteria, pretesting materials before purchase, and using materials effectively.

Results:

The evaluation tools and the accompanying publications have been used and adapted in a number of settings including state WIC programs, Extension Service programs, undergraduate and graduate nutrition programs and courses, substance use, childhood obesity, lead poisoning prevention, and others. The

evaluation tools were presented as a concurrent session at the Society for Nutrition Education Annual Conference in 2000, numerous poster sessions and roundtable discussions for national and state meetings, concurrent sessions for several state meetings, and journal and newsletter articles (including the online Journal of Extension).

The evaluation tools have also been useful in revising print materials because they provide objective criteria and a systematic process. Using the tools and the four step process results in a better match between the needs of the target audience and the print and audiovisual materials purchased to achieve specific educational objectives. Applying the four-step process requires a commitment of staff resources. However, these resources are a wise investment because selecting the right materials and programs increases the effectiveness of education activities.

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